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Reconfiguration of the Modern Teacher Identity

Problemy Profesjologii nr 2, 103-108

2014

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

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Abstract

In this article I describe the socio-cultural context of education and living space of the teacher, both in the professional and private area. Moreover, the specific nature of the differences between the teacher of liquid modernity and constant modernity is explored based on the concept of Zygmunt Bauman. In my opinion the characteristics that should be close to the contemporary teacher emerge when compared to mentioned author and competences that teacher should have. On the basis of that modern teacher identity is constructed.

REKONFIGURACJE TOŻSAMOŚCI WSPÓŁCZESNEGO NAUCZYCIELA

Streszczenie

W artykule opisuję kontekst społeczno-kulturowy edukacji i przestrzeni, w której żyje nauczyciel, zarówno w sferze zawodowej, jak i prywatnej. Nadto rozważam specyfikę różnic między nauczycielem doby nowoczesności płynnej i nowoczesności stałej bazując na koncepcji Zygmunta Baumana. W moim przekonaniu wylaniają się wtedy cechy, które powinny być dziś bliskie nauczycielowi i kompetencje, które powinien posiadać. Na podstawie tego konstruuje tożsamość współczesnego nauczyciela.

1. Education contexts

Since the dawn of humanity identity of the teacher was constructed. Requirements to be met by a person wishing to become a teacher changed from age to the next century. However, a structure of identity was stable. Today as well as traditional competencies apply, they are only one of the choices. You can add at this point that a little outdated. This is due to the fact that the reality in which we live in is changing at a dizzying pace. Nothing is certain, except for the change...

A few decades ago, constant modernity was applied in social, political and cultural life. This was also applied in education system. It should be clarified that „modernity in the philosophy of science and education implies universality of discourse, repeatability and schematics in recognition of phenomena, reconstruction of senses and meanings, explaining

the reasons that cause certain effects paradigmatic of thinking, descriptive language, universalism of truths and values, stability cultural context, the creation of knowledge structures and integrated picture of the world, formulation of laws and regularities of a general nature. In turn the postmodernism philosophy of science and education implies discourse locality, varied and situational phenomena recognition, designing senses and meanings, narrative thinking, predescriptive language, textuality, ambiguity, dispersion, relativism of truths and values, variability of cultural context, creating discentered and scattered image of the world, inability to formulate laws and regularities of a general nature". In addition, as J. Gnitecki says: „In the modern age attempts are made to universalize knowledge, the creation of integrated cognitive structures based on order, necessity and identity. However, in the postmodern age come to the fore dispersed structures, based on the chaos, contingency and the difference. The examination of the philosophy of science and education in terms of modernity and postmodernity leads to a balanced approach and following consequences for the understanding of educational theory in the period of modernity and postmodernity”¹. And in this context, A. Toffler writes that during stable modernity „Mass education, [was] modeled on the model of factory, gave the basics skills of reading, writing and arithmetic, a little history and a little knowledge from several other subjects. It was an 'open curriculum'. Concealed beneath it was invisible 'hidden curriculum', with a much greater importance. It included [...] punctuality, obedience, and the ability to perform routine, repetitive work [...] Schools of second wave molded young people, generation after generation, modeling them as vulnerable, uniformed workforce, which was required by technology and electromechanical assembly line”². Teachers of the modern era, fit well into this model. Given that their authority was assigned institutionally, they could very well be realized as omniscient and indisputable authority, which the students were absolutely subordinate to. Today, it is quite the opposite. The teaching profession has been revised. In liquid modernity, teacher lost the authority assigned from the „top”. Now the teacher must fight hard every day for the status of authority. It is not easy, because there is a continual follow of changes that are present in contemporary culture which teacher must keep up with. A teacher who knows the canon of readings, while ignoring the latest trends of contemporary culture which are very important for children and young people has no chance to gain authority. Respect must be gained. Z. Bauman perfectly describes that referring to the great values and appealing to authority is far, not to write alien, to modern person. This does not mean, however, that there are no contemporary values or no authority. However, it should be noted that in recent times they have been displaced and hybridized and identity metisized. For this reason T. Szkudlarek claims, that „visions of culture pedagogy seducing with incredible harmony demand a careful revision”. Therefore, once again there is a need to ask carefully

¹ J. Gnitecki, *Filozofia nauki i edukacja w okresie nowoczesności i ponowoczesności*, Poznań 2002, p. 9.

about the relationship of culture and education³. In the world of liquid modernity the point is that not to miss the moment when one has to take the initiative „to not suddenly realize that we were left behind”. So when we stick to routine and schematic solutions, as parents and teachers, we lose in the eyes of the pupils. In the past, the work of a teacher was constant, and his position was difficult to challenge. Today, like buying the latest generation phone, (which perhaps tomorrow will lose this status), teachers need to keep up with changes in both the surrounding reality, as well as get rid of, and the acquire competencies that are current today. Hence, there is nothing to be surprised that currently it is forgotten how important is learning, and perhaps the most important⁴.

2. Configurations and reconfigurations of teachers identity

It is believed that a competent teacher is a person who has extensive knowledge and pedagogical skills. It is a professional person, reflective and knowledgeable in areas of education. Such a teacher in the whole of his work has the competence in subjects (interpretation and execution) and subjective, communication, innovation, rehabilitative, educational, research and organization skills for group tasks⁵. Moreover, it is claimed that the teacher in order to properly stimulate the student to take action, should treat a pupil in a subjective way, accurately identify their individual creative possibilities, to show the confidence and be ready and willing to cooperate⁶. But is this happening? Reality differs from the postulates. It can be argued that modern teachers are often ill-prepared for didactic and educational process. The results of analyzes authorize the conclusion that „studying teachers too rarely present creative attitude. In turn the image of the „good” or „liked” student departs from the „creative” student image. Founded fear seems to be that creative student in the school environment has a chance to meet the expectations of a teacher and gain his or her sympathy actually facing a liked student”⁷. Politeness and schematic behaviour, and the subordination of students appears to be more important for teachers than nonconformity, innovation and creativity, which are necessary to function in the modern world. And in this context, it's no wonder that students are not well prepared for further education, professional sphere or life. Unfortunately teachers, as it can be stated after Z. Nowak, „are rather poorly aware of the breakthrough that has taken place in society and what it brought (it should bring!) – changes in their professional life, and we have to admit that politics has done little to

³ T. Szkudlarek, *Media. Szkic z filozofii i pedagogiki dystansu*, Kraków 1999, p. 8-9.

⁴ Z. Bauman, *Szansa etyki w zglobalizowanym świecie*, Kraków 2007, p. 167.

⁵ S. Popek, A. Winiarz, *Nauczyciel, powołanie, pasja*, Lublin 2009, p. 316.

⁶ E. Borycka, A. Szewczyk, *Postawa twórcza a wyobrażenia studentów o uczniu „dobrym”, „lubianym”, „twórczym”*, [w:] J. Bałachowicz, A. Szkolak (red.), *Z zagadnień profesjonalizacji nauczycieli wczesnej edukacji w dobie zmian*, Kraków 2012, p. 131.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 140.

change this state of affairs. This results in the extreme well-being and non-acceptance of the fact that one of the pillars of each regime for the last two hundred years and the way its legitimacy was a public school, „which, the teachers create”⁸. Creative teacher, ready for a change, open, tolerant, fair, flexible, rich in knowledge from books, but also the media, who can reconcile what is universal with what is particular, listening and respecting the student, brilliant, competent and friendly, and also emphasizing dialogue and wise understanding of the world of young people, has a chance to become an authority and a professional for our time...

3. Innovative education in the concept of Zygmunt Bauman

Bauman describing education uses military metaphor. Is it random? It seems that both in the past and today, education is a battlefield. It's no wonder that Bauman compares it to the ballistic and intelligent missile. In the first case, this is a typical metaphor for modern education. In the era of stable modernity as Bauman- writes, „[...] principals, teachers in schools – were seen primarily as experts in surveillance and implementation of discipline”⁹. It is not a surprise that a student knew the path already at the moment of launch; knew its shape, position, and number of „spent gunpowder.” With high probability it could also be specified where the bullet would land (the finish of the educational process). This place could also be chosen as a result of changes in the position of the barrel and the amount of gunpowder. The goal was durable and inevitable, unambiguous and clear. On the other hand, in the liquid modernity ballistic missiles were out of sight of the gunners (teachers and students), for these times are irregular and unpredictable, we had to come up with something new. Therefore let us go back to the intelligent missile. This missile is a metaphoric exemplification of education in postmodern days, after all, it can „change direction during flight in the light depending on new circumstances” (changes in society and culture). It can also keep up to date „ the target position and make the necessary amendments to its trajectory. Intelligent missile also can receive all information from the outside on the current target, direction of movement and speed. It is worth noting that the target is always moving, so the missile cannot stop its flight. Thus, the calculation must be updated continuously determining the place of the meeting. From this perspective, it is obvious that the target point in education and self-teaching, both for teachers and students, is not determined once and for all, unchanging, fixed and clear. In this situation, „you only need to calculate and implement appropriate measures”, which will be used to respect the changes. Because intelligent missiles learn during the flight they must

⁸ Z. Nowak, *Skąd przyszli, kim są i dokąd zmierzają nauczyciele szkół publicznych?*, [w:] J. Bałachowicz, A. Szkolak (red.), *Z zagadnień profesjonalizacji nauczycieli wczesnej edukacji w dobie zmian*, Kraków 2012, p. 159.

⁹ Z. Bauman, *Prawodawcy i tłumacze*, Warszawa 1998, p. 92.

be properly equipped before with ability to learn, but also more important feature: the rapid forgetting to repeat again. This is due to the fact that today one cannot attach too much to the intelligence and habits, because these undergo constant changes that create new challenges¹⁰. It is not surprising, therefore, that „success in life (and therefore rationality) of postmodern people, and in this case teachers, is more influenced today by the speed with which they can overcome old habits. The best to do is not to worry about the issue of models; and cope without any habits ... „¹¹. This situation may seem shocking to those involved in teaching. However, the above vision becomes more tangible and in western countries, actually present. There is therefore no doubt that it is important that the teacher was like amoeba carried on the wave of contemporary changes. And here, for example, E. Misioma calls that constructivism in contemporary education that primarily focuses on own activity of individual¹², necessary in the context of the outlined changes. It can also be added that the teacher, if is well-educated, and if the subject is taught in accordance with the direction of education, is an ambassador for the field in the education of their students¹³. But that's not all.

D. Czajkowska-Ziobrowska claims that the world of media, in which youth is interested in, is equally accessible to both of them. Laptop, projector, DVD equipment or LED TV is at your fingertips, with no restrictions. However, as the author adds, not entirely. Many teachers are not competent to perform their maintenance¹⁴. And in this issue the students are far running out of line, because one can say that we are born with the ability to support the latest electronic equipment. They are more important today than the knowledge of quantum physics, and theorems of Pythagoras. In this context, one can add that in every store the latest achievements of scientific thought are available. Moreover, they are so refined that they seem to be extremely user-friendly, safe and interactive, and above all the use of them is more interesting than sitting in the school bench. Here the access to the latest fashion in science and its achievements depend on the possession of money, not from professional position or scientific degree. To recall, the acquired knowledge, skills and habits in a world of constant technological revolution become a burden rather than an asset. In these circumstances the ability to keep up with the latest technological development, short-term training courses imposed by the employer become more attractive than a full university education, which today does not provide a career for life. Unfortunately, traditional university education cannot keep up with the pace of „flexible experimentation imposed by the labor

¹⁰ Z. Bauman, *Etyka ponowoczesna*, Warszawa 1996, p. 219-221.

¹¹ Z. Bauman, *Zindywidualizowane społeczeństwo*, Gdańsk 2008, p. 154.

¹² E. Misiorna, Psychopedagogiczne wyznaczniki edukacji zintegrowanej, [w:] H. Sowińska, E. Misiorna, R. Michalak (red.), *Konteksty edukacji zintegrowanej*, Poznań 2002, p. 40.

¹³ K. Kruszewski, O nauczaniu i uczeniu się w szkole, (w:) *Sztuka nauczania. Czynności nauczyciel*, Warszawa 2005, p.130.

¹⁴ D. Czajkowska-Ziobrowska, Kompetencje techniczno-medialne w społeczeństwie współczesnym, [w:] „Problemy profesjologii” 2000, nr 1, p. 69-70.

market” and cannot absorb the lack of standards, and what's involved, the unpredictability of their mutations¹⁵. Teachers need to be aware of this.

4. Reinterpretation

There is no doubt that in the modern, fluid world teachers face many challenges. Meeting the ministerial requirements and the discrepancy between the expectations of students, are a major problem. If we add to this the specificity of contemporary reality, these requirements seem unlikely to meet. And yet! One of my students, who had a problem with her daughter's motivation for learning to read using all possible means, tried another approach. Knowing the love of her girl to Hannah Montana, she decided to purchase a magazine dedicated to the TV show. This idea brought surprising, but at the same time efficient result: the daughter of a student with full passion learned how to read. Although not as teachers would like, based on the creations of elite culture, but on the offer proposed by popular culture, yet with success. This example shows how brilliantly teacher competence, among other things necessary for the effective process of education. Openness to new sources and proposals coming from the world of media and consumer culture, will help in achieving the objectives relating to the reality of the elite culture and its derivatives. Ability to reconcile these two worlds, seems to be the key of competence of a modern teacher.

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¹⁵ Z. Bauman, *Zindywidualizowane...*, op. cit., p. 156-161.